



BUILDING STRONGER LEADERSHIP FOR A DIVERSE, CHANGING COMMUNITY

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2 On Wednesday, June 29, 2011 a poverty simulation was held at the Civic Center with 77 participants and volunteers. The simulation was facilitated by Sean Ozbun, Family & Community Services Manager for SEK-CAP; and organized by the Chamber of Commerce and the Diversity Taskforce.

3 The poverty simulation experience was designed to help participants understand what it might be like to live in a typical low-income family trying to survive from month to month. It was a simulation, not a game. The object was to sensitize participants to the realities faced by low-income people. In the simulation, participants assumed the roles of families facing

poverty. Some families were newly unemployed, some were recently deserted by the "breadwinner," some were homeless, and others were recipients of public assistance, either with or without additional earned income. Still others are senior citizens receiving Disability or Retirement or grandparents raising their grandchildren. The task of the "families" was to provide for basic necessities and shelter during the course of four 15-minute "weeks."

The simulation was conducted in a large room with the "families" seated in groups in the center. Around the perimeter are tables representing community

resources and services for the families. These services include a bank, super center, Community Action Agency, employer, utility company, pawn broker, grocery, social service agency, faith based agency, payday/title loan facility, mortgage company, home-less shelter, school, and child care center. Volunteers staffed the resource tables and assumed the roles of police officer and an "illegal activities" person. Prior to the simulation starting, the participants and volunteers were advised of the following by Sean Ozbun:

"More than 43.5 million Americans live below the official poverty line—which is now approximately \$22,000 for a family of four—and nearly 15.5 million children are poor in this country."

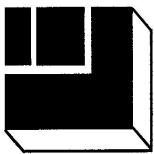
Inequality of wealth has reached record highs—it is greater than at any time since 1929.

Growing portions of the nation's wealth are concentrated in the possession of a small fraction of households, while nearly a third of Americans are trying to get by on incomes less than 200 percent (Continued on page 3)

Pictured is Charlotte Muse as she attempts to find resources to take care of her family during the poverty simulation experience.

**Leadership
Independence**

A program of the Independence Chamber of Commerce



UP SYNDROME BY GINA VILLASMIL

Summertime. Makes me think of family vacations. What's the hardest part of taking a trip? Packing!!! So much time and preparation comes with a family trip. You've got the trip all planned out down to every pit stop. You're all loaded up and headed out on the road. Soon, you find yourself lost. You can't find your map. You don't have a GPS. Fear sets in and you realize you're lost. All that preparation and you can't figure out how to get there. Isn't that how life works? No matter how much we plan and prepare. We can find ourselves lost. Hopefully, we can find someone that can guide us in the right direction.

I had her room completely organized waiting on her arrival. Fresh paint on the walls. New curtains made and hung by a proud Grandma and Grandpa. Her dresses were hung neatly in her closet. All her diapers stacked and ready. Her new quilt also made by Grandma was folded neatly over her crib. My hospital bag was packed and the outfit she would wear home from the hospital was secured neatly in my bag. Austin couldn't wait to meet his new "Sissy" and had been charged with taking care of a baby doll until Sissy came along. Every preparation had been made.

I was all prepared; mentally prepared for my beautiful baby girl and anxiously imagined all the wonderful memories we would have together as a family. She would complete it and I was so excited to meet my angel girl. And what an angel she was.

My daughter was beautiful. Weighing 7 lbs, and 19 inches long. A lot of black hair that was pink bow ready. She had the cutest features. A little button nose and big beautiful brown eyes. The most perfect lips I have ever seen. She also brought something a little extra with her



that would change our lives completely.

I remember vividly the phone call. I was holding Rachel. My mom just happened to stop by on her lunch break to check on her new grand baby girl. I had to pass Rachel to my mom because a cry came from my inner being...and I couldn't stop. All the doctor said was there was blood work he needed to go over with me and I must come in to his office. I remember the words, "She has Down syndrome, doesn't she?" emitting from my mouth before my brain absorbed what I was saying.

One extra chromosome threw our lives in a whole different direction and I was lost without a compass. Trisomy 21, otherwise known as Down Syndrome. It is an error in cell division. Trisomy 21 means that each cell in the body has three copies of chromosome 21 instead of the usual two. Simply a fluke that happens at conception. Nothing you can do prevents Down Syndrome.

Where do we go from here? This isn't how it was supposed to be? What now? Why us? No one could answer our questions. No help was offered. Just advice that included, "Take her home and love her." Taking her home and loving her was a

given. Of course we would. But what can I do to help her? To love her is to help her become the best she can be - whatever that may be. Rachel-at her best. Isn't that what we want for all children? To help them reach their full potential?

My new mission in life became a researcher. I researched many cases of kids with Down Syndrome. I found early intervention services and many other things that would help my daughter. But researching while grieving was traumatic. I shouldn't have read some of the negative information out there. Out-dated information with lists of institutions and agencies willing to take my baby if I didn't want a baby with Down Syndrome. Outdated information on life expectancy broke my heart. Gruesome pictures, negative information I wished I'd never seen. I realized this must be what every parent goes through when given a diagnosis like this. It is like traveling on uncharted waters without a compass.

I also found amazing services that I contacted which helped me get her the help she needed. Therapists came to our home and worked with her. Doctors and geneticists helped guide me on how to medically help her, to make sure we stayed on track on everything due to heart issues and other medical issues that come with Down Syndrome.

Rachel is now 10 and I call her my "ray of sunshine." She gives me love that words can't describe and is healthy and flourishing and busy

filling our family with an unexplainable love with just her existence and smile. She is smart, funny, beautiful and full of life.

I have a new mission now. It's helping other families. I have now dedicated my free time to what is called, "The **RACHEL** (Resources Available for Children to Have Exceptional Lives) Packet." When there is a diagnosis of any kind, for any baby or child that has a mental, physical or developmental delay, my hope is they receive this packet. It contains all the information needed to help them help their child become the best he/she can be. Resources such as home health services, support groups, reading materials on parenting a child with special needs, even reading materials for siblings to check out to help them prepare for having a brother or sister who has special needs.

My Ray of Sunshine is my "guiding light." Literally. She has been my map - helping me find my way and finding my niche in life. She has ignited a passion in me to help other families. All children are a celebration. All children have abilities. Even the disabled. Celebrate by helping these special children become the BEST version of themselves, first by giving love, help and hope.

My son wishes I could do something about the name of Rachel's diagnosis. We've decided it should be called "Up Syndrome" because she keeps the corners of our mouths pointed in that direction every day!

If you would like a **Rachel Packet** or additional information, you may call Gina Villasmil (620) 714-0336 or email at gina.mich@hotmail.com

POVERTY SIMULATION EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

of the federal poverty line—or about \$44,000 for a family of four.

Well before the current economic crisis, 6 million low-income households were paying more than half their income on rent and utilities, or lived in severely substandard housing. And the most recent data for 2008 revealed that almost 50 million people, including nearly one in four children, lived in a household struggling against hunger.”

After the simulation the participants and volunteers were debriefed and shared their feelings and experiences and talked about what they had learned about the lives of people in poverty. Some of the comments included;

“I have a better understanding of what families must do to get help ... I want to encourage my students to get an education. Hopefully they will get good jobs and not live in poverty.”



City employees work creatively to share resources and manage their responsibilities.

“[This training] gave me insight to hardships and resources not realized prior to today.”

It gave me insight into how desperate people become to survive and feed their families... [and made me] more understanding of those without means.”

(Continued page 5)



Pictured above, Curtis Hunter pawns some of his possessions to give him money to pay his bills from Pawn Broker, Kenny Farmer. Top Right, a participant attempts to pay utility bills. To the right, Lona Reeves assists a participant with Social Service needs.



“Do not judge by appearances; a rich heart may be under a poor coat.”

Scottish Proverb

Mike Passauer has a time keeping up with his sons while trying to work and maintain his home



BUZZLE.COM WHAT IS CULTURE? BY DEEPA KARTHA

Everyone talks about their culture with very high regard. However, do you know what exactly culture is? Let us discover the meaning of culture and its significance in the life of an individual and society.

Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future - Albert Camus

Culture is an integral part of every society. It is a learned pattern of behavior and ways in which a person lives his or her life. Culture is essential for the existence of a society, because it binds people together. In the explicit sense of the term, culture constitutes the music, food, arts and literature of a society. However, these are only the products of culture followed by the society and cannot be defined as culture.

According to English Anthropologist Edward B Taylor, culture is *that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.*

Culture is something that a person learns from his family and surroundings, and is not

ingrained in him from birth. It does not have any biological connection because even if a person is brought up in a culture different from that in which he was born, he imbibes the culture of the society where he grows up. It is also not a hidden fact that some people feel the need to follow the beliefs and traditions of their own culture, even though they might be not subscribing to certain ideologies within.

Culture is a complex tool which every individual has to learn to survive in a society. It is the means through which people interact with others in the society. It acts in a subconscious way and whatever we see and perceive, seems to be normal and natural. Sometimes, other societies and people seem to be a little odd because they have a different culture from ours. We must remember that every society has a distinct culture that forms the backbone of the society. Culture does not remain stagnant, on the other hand it is evolving constantly

and is in fact somewhat influenced by the other cultures and societies.

Every society has a different culture, where people share a specific language, traditions, behaviors, perceptions and beliefs. Culture gives them an identity which makes them unique and different from people of other cultures. When people of different cultures migrate and settle in another society, the culture of that society becomes the dominant culture and those of the immigrants form the subculture of the community. Usually, people who settle in other nations imbibe the new culture, while at the same time strive to preserve their own.

Although every society has a specific culture, there are certain elements of culture that are universal. They are known as cultural universals, in which there are certain behavioral traits and patterns that are shared by all cultures around the world. For instance, classifying relations based on blood relations and marriage,

differentiating between good and bad, having some form of art, use of jewelry, classifying people according to gender and age, etc., are common in all cultures of the world.

Some people believe that humans are the only living beings who have a culture. But, there is a group of people who believe in the existence of culture even in animals. It is said that animals have certain social rules which they teach their young ones as a medium for survival.

Culture is necessary to establish an order and discipline in the society. It is not only a means of communication between people, but also creates a feeling of belonging and togetherness among people in the society.





Leadership Independence

A program of the Independence Chamber of Commerce

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Visit us on the Web at
www.indkschamber.org

What is your passion?

**What is your vision for
Independence?**

**Where do you want to serve the
community?**

Is it in your church?

**Is it with the Chamber of
Commerce?**

Perhaps in the schools?

You are invited to become engaged to better our community. Get involved today. For more information, call Lisa Wilson at the Independence Chamber of Commerce, 620.331.1890.

POVERTY SIMULATION EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

"The stress level increased every week, think about what happens after months, or years."

"I could never understand why people couldn't get jobs to get their family on track, but there are a lot more factors involved."

"Not everyone is in a position to find a job if you are caring for other family members."

Regarding how the training inspired them to take action, one replied;

"Be more aware of the circumstances others may be in. Try to promote social resources and justice for those living in poverty."

"People are edgy because of job loss and stress and they need some friendliness and help."

"It got me thinking about what I can do to make a difference."

"It made me realize that some people have no voice."

If you are interested in attending or holding a poverty simulation you may contact

Sean Ozbun at SEK-CAP at (620) 724-8204.

Pictured below, participant Rusty Baker and Remington accept charity from Community Action Agency as administered by volunteer Micky Webb.

All photos are compliments of Kelly Passauer



This edition's

QUESTIONS TO PONDER and DISCUSS:

What services are you aware of in our community to assist people who live in poverty?

What can you and I do to assist those in our midst who live in poverty every day?

The unemployed, the sick and disabled, elderly and frail, single parents, grandparents raising their grandchildren, even great-grandchildren, etc. They are all around us!

Take off your blinders and notice them.